

FRAZER, ELIZABETH, D.M.A. Ophelia as Archetype: Jake Heggie's *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*. (2012)

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The character Ophelia has captured humanity's imagination for centuries. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, her role, although small, was instrumental as the title character's erstwhile girlfriend who goes mad. Ophelia remains relevant in modern culture, whether it be in Natalie Merchant's pop CD title *Ophelia* or in Jake Heggie's *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*. This paper demonstrates why a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience can still relate to and identify with Ophelia.

The reader will learn why and how Ophelia's image has transformed over the last 400 years through a brief discussion of Carl Jung's archetypal theories, and examples of images of Ophelia in artwork since the 1700's. Further discussion will reveal how Jake Heggie, with his careful choice of poet and of poetry, and use of compositional techniques was able to personify the archetypes that Ophelia has represented through the centuries in his 1999 composition, *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*.

OPHELIA AS ARCHETYPE: JAKE HEGGIE'S  
*SONGS AND SONETS TO OPHELIA*

by  
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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## PREFACE

There is a willow grows aslant at brook,  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
There are pendant boughs her coronet weeds  
Clamb'ring to hang, envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;  
Which time she chaunted snatches of old tunes,  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element; but long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy their drink,  
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death.

—Queen Gertrude  
Hamlet, Act IV, Scene VII

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The character of Ophelia has captured imaginations for centuries. Although her role in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is small, it is significant, as this unimportant maiden from a play of the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century still captivates humanity hundreds of years later. Ophelia's universality may be attributed to Shakespeare's genius for representation, or it may be that individuals have assigned their own meanings and values to the character Ophelia. But who is Ophelia? Why is she still relevant to 21<sup>st</sup> century audiences?

Ophelia's relevance has changed to take on new meaning with the passing centuries because she is a literary manifestation of an archetype: an ancient image or representation stored in the human psyche. According to Carl Jung, the eminent analytic psychologist from the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, archetypes are recurring patterns or motifs that rest in the collective unconscious. Although these patterns exist at the unconscious level, one recognizes them on a conscious level where the interpretations can be highly diverse because of individual and cultural inferences or variances.

In her book, *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*, Carol Solomon Kiefer states, "The archetype, which Shakespeare captured so memorably in his Ophelia, never seems to struggle for relevance, so willingly does it adapt to changes of time, place and ideology."<sup>1</sup> In the eras since Ophelia's premiere, perceptions of her have changed with

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Solomon Kiefer, "The Myth and Madness of Ophelia." In *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*, edited by Carol Solomon Kiefer, 38. Amherst: Mead Art Museum, 2001.

the evolving aesthetics and attitudes towards women and madness. The morphing of this female archetype can be traced through portrayals of Ophelia, whose myriad images reveal much about the cultures from which they originate.

The underlying archetype of Ophelia as the innocent maiden driven mad has remained throughout the ages. The original archetype has grown and merged with others, such as the child, the heroine, the temptress and later the femme fatale, and death and rebirth through water. Cultural shifts in attitudes toward women have made the waif-like woman of the Hamlet version somewhat more complicated than she originally appeared.

In 1999 Jake Heggie composed *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*, a set of four songs for soprano and piano that evoke Ophelia's legend. He chose not to use the texts from Ophelia's mad scenes, which is the norm in songs about Ophelia; he instead used poems that create a loose narrative reflecting Ophelia's story by using a poem of his own as well as three poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay. The choice of Millay's poetry and Heggie's compositional techniques combine to create a personification of Ophelia, her madness, and the archetypes she symbolizes.

The following discussion includes (a) a brief presentation of Jung's archetypal theories; (b) the ways in which representations of Ophelia and her universality through the centuries can be understood through these theories; (c) the significance of Heggie's choice of poetry; and (d) an analysis of compositional techniques used by Heggie to characterize Ophelia's archetypes.

### **Jung's Archetypal Theories**

To appreciate Ophelia's history as archetype, one must understand Carl Jung's theories on archetypes and the collective unconscious. According to Jung, humans share a collection of universal images or archetypes in a collective unconscious. He believed that all humans become heirs at birth to the same latent psychic information that is shared with all of humanity through all of time. According to Jungian theory, humans are born with the collective unconscious fully intact "...with the universal images that have existed since the remotest times."<sup>2</sup> The collective unconscious "is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents...that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men."<sup>3</sup> The collective unconscious is in contrast to the personal unconscious that contains "feeling-toned" information that does not begin developing until birth.<sup>4</sup>

Jung hypothesized that the contents of the collective unconscious are archetypes, or primordial images, and that they are patterns of humanity represented by a character or image. He believed that archetypes are manifested in works of art, religion, dreams, myth and fairy tales. If one considers this in terms of Plato's Theory of Forms, archetypes are "ideal forms," or true essences, of these patterns of humanity. Just as the true forms of Plato's theory exist on another plane and outside of humanity's consciousness, archetypes

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<sup>2</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious." In *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious*, eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerald Alder and William McGuire, trans RHC Hull, 2nd ed., 3-4. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 4.



never can be fully realized in the consciousness; thus, humans have created characters that represent the patterns.

Jung felt that humans live in societies suffering from an impoverishment of symbols, due partially to the breakdown of religious symbolism resulting from advancements in science. He postulated that humans crave the mystery these symbols once held because “it is only the things we don’t understand that have any meaning.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically, this would mean that once a symbol is fully understood, or once it loses its mystery, it loses its fascination. Ophelia’s character in the play is neutral enough to keep her shrouded in mystery and to allow for countless reinventions.

These images are also sought because they are part of humanity’s psychic structure and represent “real but invisible roots” of human consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Jung believed that archetypes show themselves in human behavior patterns, and since humans relate to certain archetypal patterns, they can superimpose, or project, what they *need to see* onto neutral characters like Ophelia.

The understanding and interpretation of archetypes is one way to find a connection to the eternal, the divine; they remind us that we are not alone and can connect us to the struggles of all humanity. Examples of this kind of search for past connections and links to the divine can be seen in modern day ancestral searches done through DNA testing, in religious quests, and in the search for a homeland—something to which one can “belong.” Jung described the appeal of archetypes this way:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 160.

The moment when the mythological situation appears is always characterized by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were touched which had never resounded before or as though forces were unchained whose existence we never dreamed . . . At such moments we are no longer individuals, but the race, the voice of all mankind resounds in us . . . it calls up a stronger voice than our own.<sup>7</sup>

Jung proposed that archetypes progress forward through time into “modern dress” with each culture’s new interpretations.<sup>8</sup> For example, the archetypal image of “Temptress” was commonly associated with mythological characters like Sirens or Naiads in ancient Greek mythology, whereas today people are more familiar with the femme fatale image seen in modern cinema. The representative image has changed but the meaning, or the ideal form, of the archetype has stayed the same. Claire Douglas explicates Jung’s theory of the evolving representations of archetypes further in her book, *The Woman in the Mirror: Analytical Psychology and the Feminine*:

. . . the outward mode of presentation [of the archetype] and the value accorded it are subject to the vagaries of a particular time and culture, to individual experience, and to all the varying interpretations of the conscious mind. *Thus, though the archetype itself is unchanging and eternal, its manifestations can reflect the prejudices of the time.* [emphasis added]<sup>9</sup>

Archetypes can be understood only by peering through the lens of a particular culture combined with the unique nuances that each individual brings to the analysis. This

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Rothenberg and Carl R. Hausmann, eds. “Carl Jung’s Essay: On the Reaction of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art.” In *The Creativity Question*, 125-126. Durham: Duke University Press, 1976.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Douglas, *The Woman in the Mirror*, 59-60.

explains why representations of Ophelia have been so varied for the last four hundred years.

The evolution of Ophelia's image reveals much about the cultures through which she has traveled. It illustrates how the views of women and madness have transformed, while in some ways remaining the same, since the times of Shakespeare. Her character signifies woman's lot; her madness and death symbolize the breaking of her patriarchal chains. Her innocence is representative of the patriarchal view of the temperamental, childish emotions of women and her madness is symbolic of the fear of, and fascination with, woman's sexuality that has pervaded western culture since ancient times.

## CHAPTER II

### OPHELIA'S HISTORY

#### Ophelia's Story

In pursuit of Ophelia's story the feminist critic Lee Edwards concluded that it is not possible to reconstruct Ophelia's history from the information given in the play. She states that, "We can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet."<sup>10</sup> What one is left with are interpretations of what is heard from the other characters in the play, and more significantly from the cultures and societies that have lived with Ophelia since her genesis.

Fintan O'Toole characterized Ophelia this way:

Shakespeare has shown us an Ophelia who is shaped and formed and defined by others, in particular by men. She is defined in turn by Laertes [brother], Polonius [father], and Hamlet [possible lover] and deserted in turn by each. She has no identity of her own, only that which is constructed for her by others . . . All of her actions and responses are about what other people think for her and of her before they disappear and her defining forces are removed.<sup>11</sup>

The interpretation of Ophelia begins with Shakespeare's famous tragedy *Hamlet*. This five-act play of twenty scenes runs four hours in length, which presumably is enough time to become acquainted with all of the principle characters; however, during

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<sup>10</sup> Lee R. Edwards, "The Labors of Psyche: Toward a Theory of Female Heroism," *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 36.

<sup>11</sup> Fintan O'Toole, *Shakespeare is Hard, But so is Life: A Radical Guide to Shakespearean Tragedy*, Rev. Ed. (London: Granta Books, 2002), 63.

the entire play Ophelia appears in only five scenes and is on stage for less than twenty minutes. She went mad but the cause of her madness is never made clear. She drowned in a pond covered in flowers but this does not occur onstage, and whether her death was an accident or suicide is never clarified. The only known account of her death is from Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, as she describes the willow over the brook, and the "fantastic garlands" brought by Ophelia to the scene, with "her clothes spread wide...till that her garments, heavy with their drink pulled the poor wretch...to muddy death" (Hamlet, Act IV, Scene VII). Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet was vague, and it is not known whether Ophelia gave Hamlet her virginity.

Ophelia's character suggests woman's plight throughout history. The naïveté of her character captures the patriarchal view of the temperamental and childish emotions of women. Her madness is symbolic of the fear of, and fascination with, feminine sexuality that has been associated with the archetypal temptress or seductress since the 1800's. She has also become the archetypal heroine by the breaking of her patriarchal chains through madness and death. Death by drowning symbolizes a rebirth, as the archetypal symbol of "water" is connected to being spiritually purified and reborn.

Ophelia's archetypal journey began in Europe in 1599, when the continent was still reeling from the effects of the Protestant Reformation. Many still believed in ghosts and witches—beliefs that fifty years later would be considered antiquated due to advances in science. This was a time of rapidly changing societal structures where the worlds of inherited status and the rise of the merchant class were overlapping.<sup>12</sup> Royalty

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<sup>12</sup> O'Toole, *Shakespeare is Hard, But so is Life*, 25-27.

was trying to hold on to its relevancy, and merchants were trying to elevate their social position through the acquisition of wealth. Structures on which societies were based were changing fundamentally, and the transition from feudalism to capitalism was a wrenching shift. In this world women had little to no status, madness in women was considered common, and women lived according to the will of the men of whose lives they were a part.

During this time Ophelia would probably have been dismissed as just another young woman suffering from “erotomania,” a melancholy love sickness that was believed to be quite common in young women spurned by love.<sup>13</sup> It is doubtful that much consideration would have been given to her character. Carroll Camden notes in his article, “On Ophelia’s Madness,” that based on medical writings on madness during Shakespeare’s time, Ophelia’s clearly-portrayed symptoms would be recognizable to the Elizabethan audience “as a girl suffering physically and mentally the pangs of rejected love.”

### **Ophelia’s Universality**

In the 1700’s, over one hundred years after *Hamlet* was first performed, multiple artists’ renderings of Ophelia began to appear in paintings, drawings, and etchings. Through the 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fascination with madness in women was increasing. As the number of women in insane asylums swelled, representations of madness began to be portrayed in multiple art forms. Artists were becoming fascinated

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<sup>13</sup> Elaine Showalter, “Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism.” In *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, edited by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, 81. New York: Methuen Inc., 1985.

with depicting Ophelia's madness, especially in the events immediately preceding her drowning, which is intriguing because this scene is not in the play. For the most part, however, the moral sensitivities of the Classical and Enlightenment Era dictated that madness was too shameful to be acted in a realistic manner on stage, and explicit expressions of Ophelia's madness did not become fashionable until the latter part of the 1700's.<sup>14</sup>

In the world of art, themes moved from illustrations and etchings of actual scenes from the play of the lovesick maiden in the white dress, to depictions that evoked sensuality and suggested the universal image of the temptress. These representations also move Ophelia into nature often showing her before she falls into the water, and to her death. The significance of the move out of doors is that it represents the importance of nature to the artists of the Romantic Era. These are especially obvious in Henry Tresham's 1794 drawing that portray Ophelia bare breasted, leaning over the water, as she reaches to put her garland of flowers around a branch of a weeping willow over the pond in which she will later drown.<sup>15, 16</sup>

Towards the end of the Classical Era and the beginning of the Romantic Era, madness in music was becoming *en vogue*. In the Bel Canto period of Italian opera there was a surge in popularity of the operatic mad woman. The composers Bellini and Donizetti are still famous for their operas featuring mad women. In Ambroise Thomas's

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<sup>14</sup> Showalter, 82.

<sup>15</sup> To view this image see: <http://www2.dsu.nodak.edu/users/aasand/Tresham.htm>

<sup>16</sup> The image of a young woman placing a garland around the branch of the willow is symbolic of the offering of her virginity.

1868 operatic version of *Hamlet*, he expanded the role of Ophelia giving the character an entire act, all of which is an extended mad scene.

In 1802 Johann Zumsteeg composed a song, *Ophelia*, which was a German translation of the text of a portion of Ophelia's mad scene. Later in the century, Johannes Brahms and Ernest Chausson also set translations of Ophelia's mad scenes, but the settings of Ophelia in song are mild in their representations of her madness compared with the extreme vocal demands of Ophelia in Thomas's opera. In contrast to the practices used by operatic composers in their representations of madness, the songs about Ophelia by Zumsteeg, Brahms and Chausson were composed in a way that represented the sensibilities of the era. They did not convey Ophelia's madness in a way that took advantage of the vocal fireworks that were so popular with operagoers of the era, or in a way with which 21<sup>st</sup> century listeners would understand as madness.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Ophelia had even become an important figure in the medical community, where there were medical physicians who believed in an "Ophelia case" diagnosis.<sup>17</sup> Young women in institutions began to take on the appearance of how they imagined Ophelia to look; she became the voice for a population of young women who could not speak for themselves. This can be seen in photographs taken by Hugh Diamond, one of the first photographers to take medical pictures of psychiatric patients. Diamond had one institutionalized young woman pose and dress according to the societal expectations of mad women and even included the white dress and flower-strewn hair.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Showalter, *Representing Ophelia*, 85-86.

<sup>18</sup> See: [http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Diamond.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Diamond.html)



In 1852, there were two famous paintings of Ophelia done captured multiple sides of her archetypes. The first painting is by Arthur Hughes and shows a very young girl wearing a white dress representing her innocence and captures the child-like Ophelia.<sup>19</sup> The second, John Everett Millais's 1852 painting of Ophelia is the most iconic and well-recognized image of her.<sup>20</sup> This painting signals a change in her representations because it was the first rendering of Ophelia after death, and it suggests the archetypal image of death and rebirth. Prior to this time, images of Ophelia depict her before her descent into the pond, leaning to the other side. No longer depicted in the white dress symbolizing innocence, she is seen at the moment of her surrender, having taken the ultimate journey and reached the idealized death celebrated by the Romantic Era as she united with nature.<sup>21</sup>

An 1880 painting by the female artist Madeleine Lemaire counteracted the innocence of the young maiden with a striking sexuality that took the sensual side of Ophelia further than had yet been seen. This representation depicted a shift in cultural impressions of Ophelia (woman) as temptress.<sup>22</sup>

As the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century dawned, depictions of Ophelia became both more realistic and more stylized. The world was moving towards World War I and people could relate to the terrors that the realistic versions of the Ophelia character portrayed. A

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<sup>19</sup> See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur\\_Hughes\\_-\\_Ophelia\\_\(First\\_Version\).JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur_Hughes_-_Ophelia_(First_Version).JPG)

<sup>20</sup> See: <http://www.tate.org.uk/ophelias/>

<sup>21</sup> Kiefer, *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> See: [http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Lemaire.Ophelia.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Lemaire.Ophelia.html)

Georg Falkenberg 1898 photograph entitled *Ophelia* showed a sincerely desperate woman.<sup>23</sup> Bram Dijkstra described the image as “a depiction of a modern woman wracked with nervous self-doubt and obsessive introspection.”<sup>24</sup> This is such a believable image that one can believe she is about to throw herself into the water, to her own death. A more stylized pen and ink drawing from an illustrated 1922 edition of *Hamlet* by John Austen shows an Ophelia who has lost the innocence represented by the white dress, or of any clothing at all.<sup>25</sup> In true Expressionist fashion she is depicted as a woman in the raptures of sexual bliss in harmony with the ecstasy of death.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century there are more examples of Ophelia’s mad songs being set to music. In 1924, British composer Elizabeth Maconchy wrote “Ophelia’s Song.” In Quilter’s set of Four Shakespeare Songs he includes Ophelia’s “How should I your true love know,” composed in 1933. Also in the 1970s she was represented in the world of art music in a setting of the text of her mad scene called “Ophelia Sings” for soprano and chamber orchestra by Kim Borg. In the 1980’s, she started appearing in modern popular culture on the back of Kate Bush’s 1985 album, *Hounds of Love*. Natalie Merchant recorded her album *Ophelia* in the 1990’s, along with a short film of the same name that portrayed women from all walks of life, each of which she named “Ophelia.”

Possibly the most popular settings of her texts are by Richard Strauss. Published in 1918, *Drei Ophelia Lieder* are considered to be the most effective settings of Ophelia’s

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<sup>23</sup> See: [http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Falkenberg.Ophelia.html](http://english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Falkenberg.Ophelia.html)

<sup>24</sup> Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de Siècle Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 44.

<sup>25</sup> See: [http://perso.wanadoo.es/al.59/images/Ofelias/1922-%20Death%20of%20Ofelia%20\(John%20Austen\).jpg](http://perso.wanadoo.es/al.59/images/Ofelias/1922-%20Death%20of%20Ofelia%20(John%20Austen).jpg)

mad songs to date. Strauss set Ophelia's text in way that took advantage of the breaking down of tonality and formal boundaries that defined much of art music in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The mid-20<sup>th</sup> century saw a decrease in the number of Ophelia images seen in artwork and music. Many versions of the play *Hamlet* were filmed for the big screen with varying archetypal images of Ophelia for each. It was not until the birth of feminist studies and criticism of the 1970's that Ophelia was given a fresh face. Ophelia became the heroine for countless women who viewed her madness as a rebellion against patriarchal and social orders. Ophelia gave them a voice and was a personality around which they rallied. At a time when the women's liberation movement was very influential, Ophelia was adopted as a voice and archetypal heroine representing the search to true self and destiny.<sup>26</sup>

Photographs of the later 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries were often thoughtfully-posed Ophelias in a variety of settings. In the late 1980's, Fad Magazine published photographs by Kim Stringfellow that were modern versions of an Ophelia who had lost her innocence.<sup>27</sup> A photograph by Greg Crewdson pays homage to the 1852 Millais painting; however, he moved Ophelia from the pond of the 17<sup>th</sup> century into the realm of the 21<sup>st</sup> century housewife, with the Ophelia character lying in a flooded living room, exhibiting an air of despair amidst the trappings of a cluttered household.<sup>28</sup> The

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<sup>26</sup> Showalter, *Representing Ophelia*, 91.

<sup>27</sup> See: <http://kimstringfellow.photoshelter.com/image/I0000kL15gDcL65E>

<sup>28</sup> Keifer, *The Myth and Madness of Ophelia*, 31.

patriarchal chains of the 17<sup>th</sup> century are modernized as the day-to-day pressures and societal shackles of women. The woman has surrendered to the mounting pressures of a life with expectations she could not meet; the boundaries of the house itself represent these societal chains.<sup>29</sup>

Carl Jung's theories on archetypes and the collective unconscious offer an explanation for Ophelia's continued popularity. No one can know precisely what pattern, or form, she represents in humanity's collective unconscious, and yet she is still here. On a personal level people seek images and symbols with which they can connect; they have taken this neutral character from a play in 1599, and have continuously changed her into what they need to see. On a societal level, she represents the cultures through which she has traveled.

Although the original archetypal image of the maiden has grown and merged with others, the underlying representation of Ophelia as the innocent maiden driven mad has remained throughout the ages. It is illustrative of the contradictory views of the feminine: her innocence is illustrative of the patriarchal views of woman as child-like and unable to survive without male supervision; her madness symbolizes a fear of feminine sexuality that eventually leads to images of her that evoke the archetypal temptress. Today Ophelia is as fascinating as ever. In this empirical world where there seem to be few mysteries and symbols that carry meaning, there is Ophelia. Renderings of this character transcend the centuries, and have become timeless archetypal images with which humanity

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<sup>29</sup> See: [http://www.artnet.com/usernet/awc/awc\\_workdetail.asp?aid=424261590&gid=424261590&cid=75394&wid=424300658&page=5](http://www.artnet.com/usernet/awc/awc_workdetail.asp?aid=424261590&gid=424261590&cid=75394&wid=424300658&page=5)

continues to relate and adapts to its needs. Jake Heggie was successfully able to embody these images and gave Ophelia a new voice for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### CHAPTER III

#### *SONGS AND SONNETS TO OPHELIA: THE POETS*

##### **Jake Heggie**

Jake Heggie, an American composer, is most well known for composing operas, songs, concerti, chamber music, as well as choral and orchestral works. Heggie considers himself “an ardent champion of writers” and has set the texts of a number of major poets such as Maya Angelou, A. E. Housman, *and* Emily Dickinson, among others.<sup>30</sup> Many famous singers are proponents of his work, most notably Frederica von Stade, Susan Graham, Patti LuPone and Bryn Terfel.”<sup>31</sup>

Heggie introduces his cycle *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia* with his own poem and follows it with those of Millay. In general, Heggie does not use his own poems as song texts, but he has made a couple of exceptions. He also wrote the poem for the last song in his 2007 song cycle, *Facing Forward/Looking Back*: “Facing Forward.” Since he does not generally set his own poetry, one assumes he does so when he is at a loss for another poem that creates an effect for which he is striving. In the case of *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*, his poem begins the cycle and sets up the Ophelia-like character for the rest of the songs, which are set to poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

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<sup>30</sup> “Biography,” jakeheggie.com, (accessed November 15, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

### Edna St. Vincent Millay

Jake Heggie's choice of the poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, for his *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia* is significant. His choice to use the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay, who was considered a subversive figure in her time due to a perception of questionable morality, gives a voice to Ophelia in a way that other poets would not. In her article "Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability," Jane Stanbrough describes the poetic and life choices that earned Millay her reputation as a rebel: ". . . poems which vivified her inclination towards bohemianism and promiscuity . . . dominated by a narrative voice that irreverently mocked public opinion and public morality, that scorned imposed values and prescribed behavior."<sup>32</sup>

Born in 1892, Edna St. Vincent Millay, or Vincent as she insisted on being called, was the oldest of three daughters. They were raised by Cora Millay, a single mother who educated them with a strong emphasis on the arts.<sup>33</sup> She also encouraged them to be ambitious, and when Vincent was only 19, she urged her to enter her first poem, "Renasce," into a competition for the anthology *Lyric Year*. Though she did not win, the poem was included in the publication to widespread acclaim. When Millay recited this poem at a party, a female guest offered to become her patron and arranged for the young Millay to be educated at Vassar. During her college years she earned her infamous reputation as a promiscuous lover of both men and women, and this seems to have

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Stanbrough, "Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability." In *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, edited by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 183. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

<sup>33</sup> Poets.org From The Academy of American Poets, "Edna St. Vincent Millay," The Academy of American Poets, <http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/160> (accessed November 15, 2011).

continued throughout her life—even during her 26-year marriage to Eugen Boissevain.<sup>34</sup>

Many considered her loose views on sexuality as a dangerous influence on society.

She published her first book in 1918, the same year she graduated from Vassar. Entitled *First Fig*, it included the short poem that exemplified Millay's attitude toward sexuality and life and "ignited the imagination of a generation of American women... A wild freedom edged with death."<sup>35</sup>

My candle burns at both ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—  
It gives a lovely light!<sup>36</sup>

In 1923 Edna St. Vincent Millay became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry for her fourth collection of poems, *The Harp Weaver*. Millay wrote a few verse plays, an opera libretto that was set by Deems Taylor and although she composed poetry in all forms, she ultimately became famous as a writer of sonnets.

Many of Millay's contemporaries believed that she lacked originality in her formal poetic choices. Her avoidance of modern idiom and her use of the sonnet form caused her to be deemed unsuccessful as writer. Stanbrough comments on Millay's choice of writing in the sonnet form<sup>37</sup>:

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Nancy Milford, prologue to *Savage Beauty: The Life of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, (New York: Random House, 2001), xiii.

<sup>36</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, *First Fig and Other Poems*, ed. Joslyn T. Pine (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), 1.

<sup>37</sup> A sonnet is a strict poetic form that includes 14 lines with 10 syllables in each line and can include various rhyme schemes. The 14 lines are then further divided into three quatrains (four lines) and one



Given her time and place in the history of American poetry and given the external evidence of her unconventional childhood and youthful radicalism, one would expect to find her in the company of the avant-garde American poetry . . . She eschews the freedom of form . . . The wish for freedom is always qualified by the sense of restriction; couplets and quatrains suit her sensibility<sup>38</sup>

Millay's choice to write in the sonnet form is important because it is a form that is historically dominated by men. Stanbrough believes that the sonnet is Millay's best form because it "is a fit vehicle to convey her deepest feelings of woman's victimization.

Through it, Millay imaginatively reenacts her constant struggle against boundaries."<sup>39</sup>

She employs the form in a way that makes the poems uniquely feminine by using the boundaries of the form as a symbol for the constraints she feels society places upon her.

Millay was able to exploit the sonnet form to give a new voice to the heroines of poetry. Holly Peppe, author of "Rewriting the Myth of the Woman in Love," writes about the speaker in Millay's collection:

[The speaker] represents an unprecedented departure from the nameless female love object depicted in traditional romantic love poetry. Within this tradition women are usually depicted as generalized rather than unique, . . . or emotionally vulnerable to the point of hysteria. Because most of the poets writing within the love poetry tradition were men, the traits and myths associated with the woman's role in the romantic love motif have been primarily male-defined.<sup>40</sup>

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duplet (two lines). The transition into the last duplet often includes a shift in the poetic idea as well as some type of irony or shift in idea (which Millay often employed).

<sup>38</sup> Stanbrough, *Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability*, 198-199.

<sup>39</sup> Stanbrough, *Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability*, 199.

<sup>40</sup> Holly Peppe, "Rewriting the myth of the woman in Love: Millay's Fatal Interview," In *Millay at 100: A Critical Reappraisal*, edited by Diane P. Freedman, 54. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995)

Millay was also known for mixing vulnerable and violent language (examples of which will be seen in the poems of Heggie's cycle.) She used her poetry to represent the plight of women, and presented the heroines of her poems as victimized women with whom she identified. Stanbrough comments on this: "Millay's profound suffering and her constant rendering of personal vulnerability become increasingly comprehensible in the context of her imagery of woman as victim."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Stanbrough, *Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability*, 194.

## CHAPTER IV

### *SONGS AND SONNETS TO OPHELIA: THE POETRY AND SONGS*

#### Introduction

Jake Heggie's choice of poetry for his cycle *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia* is important, and the order in which he places them is strategic. His decision to use Millay's sonnets connects the cycle back to Shakespeare, who is widely known for his collections of sonnets. The use of poems that are bound by strict rules and boundaries is symbolic of Ophelia's own societal boundaries in the 1600's. Heggie chose not to follow the pattern of Western composers who set the text of Ophelia's mad scenes; instead he arranged four poems, one of his own and three by Edna St. Vincent Millay, that textually, as well as formally, create a loose narrative that mirrors Ophelia's own. Through these choices, Heggie creates a story that exemplifies the archetypal images of Ophelia over the centuries.

Throughout the cycle, *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*, Heggie uses multiple techniques to elicit a variety of archetypes that represent Ophelia and her madness. Heggie opens the cycle with his own poem, "Ophelia's Song," which is a structured, four-verse poem with a regular rhyme scheme. The second two poems are Millay's sonnets, which are even more formally structured than the first. The fourth poem breaks the pattern of form, as it is written in free verse. The pattern of three highly structured poems followed by one without form is symbolic of Ophelia's own odyssey through the

patriarchal and societal chains that structured her life until she was finally able to break free through her madness and death.

The texts of the poems are also meaningful, as they represent the different archetypal sides of Ophelia: the innocent maiden or the lovesick victim, the heroine, the temptress and the villain, and death and rebirth in water. Heggie placed them in an order that formally and textually suggests Ophelia's struggles, and he set the poems to music in a manner that highlights not only the text itself, but also the various archetypes that Ophelia has come to represent.

Several compositional techniques have been used to connect the text of these poems to the archetypal figures. The most obvious of these is the use of extreme and sudden shifts of mood through quick changes in the tempo and dynamics. Other methods employed are the use of recurring motifs, text painting, modal allusions, obscurity of meter, an emphasis on thirds, and non-tonal but highly triadic and often ambiguous harmonies.

For each of the songs a short discussion of the poetry will be presented, followed by an analysis of Heggie's compositional techniques. Due to the specific nature of the analyses, it is assumed that the reader will have a score of the cycle in hand for reference.<sup>43</sup>

### **Song 1: Ophelia's Song**

The hills are green, my dear one,  
and blossoms are filling the air.  
The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.

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<sup>43</sup> All of the analyses as well as the motivic designations are the work of the author.

In this flowery field I'll lay me  
 and dream of the open air.  
 The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.

Taste of the honey. Sip of the Wine.  
 Pine for a chalice of gold.  
 I have a dear one and he is mine.  
 Thicker than water. Water so cold.

In this flowery field I'll lay me  
 and dream of the open air.  
 The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.<sup>44</sup>

Heggie's poem, *Ophelia's Song*, the first of the set, is simple and repetitive with a pastoral quality reflecting Ophelia's transition to nature through her death. With its very regular meter and the largely amphibrachic and iambic meters, the poem has an unadorned, child-like quality that embodies the archetype of the innocent side of Ophelia. Each verse hints of an impending tragedy by beginning joyfully and ending with a dark statement that seems at odds with the preceding text. An unexpected change of poetic meter in the third verse (the only quatrain) to dactyls and trochees illustrates Ophelia's loss of reason. These shifts of emotion are indicative of the sudden emotional shifts often employed when depicting madness in music and on the stage. One senses that the speaker of this poem has begun the journey to join nature (or death), and that the poems that follow are reminiscences of her loves and life.

Heggie uses a variety of compositional techniques to bring this Ophelia-like character to life: text painting; a simple, flowing melody in the voice to evoke the innocence of the character in the poem; ambiguity of meter; extremes of range and

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<sup>44</sup> Jake Heggie, *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*, (n.p.: Bent Pen Music, Inc., 1999), 1.

movement in the piano part; use of Mixolydian mode calling to mind a folk quality and removing the leading tone; and quick key and tempo changes.

The opening song of the cycle foreshadows the fate of the Ophelia-like character. Heggie sets the introductory measures of the cycle with a motif that represents the young woman falling in the water. This motif returns in the first song, and again at the end of the cycle; it will be referred to as “motif 1.” The key signature is B major, but the first notes that are played are an ambiguous arpeggiation that includes most of the pitches in the key except for the inclusion of A-natural. This arpeggio evokes the image of ripples radiating from the place where the young woman landed in the pond. It is marked “shimmering” and “freely” and is followed by a low C-sharp pedal tone. Heggie utilizes a range of over five octaves in the first two measures of the introduction alone. The combination of a time signature of 4/4, a rhythmically offset pedal tone that is tied across the bar lines, and the rolled chords of motif 1, cloud any distinct feeling of meter or key and suggests an impression of expanding rings of water around the sinking woman’s figure.

The meter changes to 6/8 in m. 5 but there is little awareness of the shift because of the ambiguity of the original meter as well as a measure of rest before the voice enters on the pick-up to m. 7. The first entrance of the voice sets up the key of B major as well as a clear feeling of 6/8. The simple, lyrical melody is at odds with the image of the woman under water and represents the hallucinations and reminiscences of the drowning woman. One might think that all is well with the protagonist as the unornamented melody

continues but there are clues that something is amiss and the audience may begin to intuit the fate of the lovesick maiden.

The first indication of the maiden's misfortune is the use of A-natural. Heggie uses this lowered 7<sup>th</sup> scale degree to serve two purposes: it changes the B major scale to Mixolydian mode<sup>45</sup> which recalls folk song, and it removes the leading tone leaving the listener with an unsettled feeling. The second clue that all is not well lies in the left hand of the accompaniment in mm. 8 and 10. Instead of the flowing arpeggiations of fourths and fifths that he established in m. 7 (with both hands in the treble clef), there is an accented minor second (A-natural and B) that is sounded on the second eighth note of each of the first beats. This small hint is enough to let the listener know that something amiss.

The simplicity of the poetry is reflected in the mostly straightforward setting of the text. There are occasional hemiolas that emphasize the text in mm. 8 and 9-10 as well as mm. 17 and 18-19 on the words "dear one" and "filling the air" in the first verse and "lay me" and open air" in the second verse. Both of these examples place prominence on the text, first on the loved one and then on nature, and occur just often enough to slightly obscure the meter. Heggie sets the four verses of this poem in AABA form. The melody of the A section returns in song 4 and will be referred to as "motif 2."

At the end of the first verse the flowing arpeggios of the accompaniment briefly become diminutive versions of motif 1 from the introduction and remind the listeners that the central character is still under water (in mm. 14, 15, and 17). As verse two begins, the

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<sup>45</sup> Mixolydian mode is similar to the major scale, but has a lowered seventh scale degree. In this case, the A -sharp becomes an A-natural.

flowing arpeggios start again in the accompaniment with slight alterations. The piano part is still highly triadic, but it is now in contrary motion with an extended range, which alerts the listener that the protagonist is sinking further into her delusions.

There is a very quick shift of mood in the poetry in the third verse, the B section of the music, and Heggie emphasizes this in the accompaniment and vocal line. He fills the transition between verses two and three (mm. 22-23) with quickly descending scales in both hands in thirds. The piano part shifts to duplets; a sudden crescendo and increase in tempo create an effect of unstable enthusiasm and excitement for four or five measures. The vocal line stays in 6/8 while the piano functions in 3/4 (mm. 23-27). The juxtaposition of duplets in the piano part and triplets in the vocal line begins to create a frenetic air. In mm. 24 and 25 there are rests in the piano part for the first time since the entrance of the voice, suggesting the dismantling of her delusions. They are very short (quarter rests on beat 3) but they create enough of a stutter effect that one can almost feel the woman's hallucinations begin to weaken.

After the enthusiastic quality of mm. 24-27 there is another unexpected alteration in mood leading to a moment of clarity for the dying woman. When she begins to sing of her lover at m. 28, "I have a dear one and he is mine. Thicker than water. Water so cold," the piano part begins to still and there are sustained chords that descend by the whole step (mm. 28-32: F-sharp major, E major, D minor, C major, B-flat major) alternating with silence under the voice (mm. 29-32). In this part of the text, the Ophelia-like character seems to come to her senses for a moment and realizes that she is already descending in the water (the descending chords and piano silences). The quick-moving notes in the



piano completely stop for the first time since she began singing, and this is paired with a rapid decrescendo. In the accompaniment of this cycle, Heggie often uses silence to represent the speaker when she is in her right mind.

At m. 33, when the song moves into the fourth verse and back to the A section of music, the key signature shifts quickly to B-flat major in the Mixolydian mode; the key lowers by a half step, as the protagonist sinks into the pond and falls back into her delusion. The movement in the accompaniment resumes in the middle of a phrase as if nothing happened (m. 33) and the tempo returns to the slower tempo of the first two verses. The leading tone is still missing in the new key, and the ambiguous chords of the introduction, motif 1, of Ophelia sinking are sounded again in mm. 43 and 44. The song ends with an ominous, low B-flat in the left hand and high E-flats in the right hand leaving no question about her fate: she is sinking and dying, and her soul is leaving her body.

### **Song 2: Women Have Loved Before**

Women have loved before as I love now;  
 At least, in lively chronicles of the past—  
 Of Irish waters by a Cornish prow  
 Or Trojan waters by a Spartan mast  
 Much to their cost invaded—here and there,  
 Hunting the amorous line, skimming the rest,  
 I find some woman bearing as I bear  
 Love like a burning city in the breast.  
 I think however that of all alive  
 I only in such utter, ancient way  
 Do suffer love; in me alone survive  
 The unregenerate passions of a day

When treacherous queens with death upon the tread,  
Heedless and willful, took their knights to bed.<sup>46</sup>

The second and third poems appear in Millay's collection of sonnets, *Fatal Interview*, and the voices heard in them are much different from that of the first poem. This poem involves the main character reading of the great loves of myth in search of women with whom she can relate. She no longer represents the naïve side of Ophelia, but a strong-willed woman with a fervent awareness of her sensuality. She is the temptress, symbolic of Ophelia's madness and the societal fear of feminine sexuality that it represents.

In this poem a woman compares her love to famous lovers of myth: Isolde and Helen of Troy. It is through reading love stories about mythologized characters that the woman can comprehend what she feels for her lover. The significance of these two characters is that they are seen as innocent victims in some versions of the myth and in others as headstrong women who followed their loves and lead their countries to war: the victim on one hand and the villain on the other. Is she the victim, the lovesick maiden who follows her lover to death; or is she the villain, a femme fatale that seals her lover's fate?

In a traditional sonnet about the love of myth one would expect flowery words, but the language that Millay chose to employ is often harsh. She does not speak of the joys of love, but of *bearing* and *suffering* love; and, to whose *cost invaded*. Millay plays with the language in the section by writing about invading armies and countries, but one

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<sup>46</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Fatal Interview*, (New York: Harpers & Brothers Publishers, 1931), 26.

can sense that the real implication is that Helen and Isolde were *invaded* by the *mast* and *prow* of their lovers. Finally, she writes of *treacherous queens*, whose fate is death, who *willfully* took their knights to bed, which show both sides of the archetype: woman being invaded as the victim, and *willful and heedless*, as the villain, taking their knights to bed.

Heggie brings both sides of this character to life with the addition of “ah’s,”—statements of her madness or her overflowing passion peppered throughout—text painting, frequent use of thirds, sudden starting and stopping of rhythmic motion in the accompaniment, repetitive accompaniment patterns, tonal ambiguity, sudden tempo changes, and extremes of dynamics.

The second song begins with 6/8 meter and Heggie’s marking at the beginning of this song is “Bright and nervous.” The introduction is a short, ascending three-measure sequence of staccato thirds, tumbling sixteenth note triplets that create motif 3 (mm. 2 and 5), and ascending thirds that leap in octaves that become motif 4. Motif 5 is heard for the first time when the voice enters in m. 3: a quick major second flourish (C, B-flat, C). The combination of these motifs accomplishes the “bright and nervous” atmosphere that leads to the first cry of the reader as she finds references to Helen and Isolde in her text: “Ah!” The sequence is repeated down a half step and it is as if the protagonist cannot contain the passion inside her as, finding another reference in her text, she cries out again, “Ah!” Following her cry is a rapid scale of sixteenth-note triplets beginning on D-flat, leading to motif 5 which will be heard again at the close of this song and at the end of the cycle.

The text enters in m. 9 in a recitative or story-telling fashion and in a considerably slower tempo. The piano part is sparse in much of the accompaniment between mm. 9-17 and consists largely of triadic intervals. The silence in the piano part is again representative of the heroine when she is not suffering from her delusions and being swept away with passion. She is discovering that others have loved with the fire that she feels for her lover: “Women have loved before as I love now; At least in lively chronicles of the past.” As she sings the word “past” in mm. 16 and 17 the piano part takes the listeners back in time using a pattern of descending triads.

The piano accompaniment increases in tempo as well as rhythmic activity as the heroine is spirited away by the mythic stories of passionate love. The accompaniment turns into stormy *Irish waters* in mm. 18 that continues through m. 25, with a quick, temporary shift to E minor. Heggie’s marking in this section is “with growing excitement” as the tempo seems to move forward and intensity builds. The water allusions in the piano in mm. 22 and 24-25 become a great tempest with quickly ascending scales that capture the swells of the stormy sea as well as the fervor of the lovers, and emphasize the double entendre as the reader tells of the “Cornish prow” and the “Spartan mast.” In m. 26 the young woman snaps out of her reverie with silence in the piano part, but just for a short time (and back to a sudden E-flat major in mm. 25 and 26) as she realizes the “cost” that Helen of Troy and Isolde paid for their “invasions.”

The water motion in the accompaniment continues and starts to swell for two measures before the woman is carried away by her passion again in m. 29 as she begins to cry “Ah!” at higher pitch levels than the beginning and with increasing agitation (mm.

29-34). The stormy waters of the accompaniment are momentarily silenced and seem like the eye of a storm in mm. 29-33 before the woman becomes overwrought with passion. In mm. 34 and 35 (and again in mm. 42-44) the water theme is partially heard again as the protagonist frantically searches the text for more references of famous women of myth that have suffered love as she has: “Here and there, Hunting the amorous line, Ah! Skimming the rest.” The partial water themes heard in the piano in this section bring to mind a keening woman and the obsessive quality of the accompaniment mirrors the protagonist’s mental state.

As the pining woman finds references of passionate love in her texts, the tempo pushes forward (mm. 43-45) and the water theme transforms unexpectedly into fire, or motif 6, in m. 46: continual and “shimmering” triadic sixteenth note triplets in the right hand of the accompaniment. The young woman is unable to contain her passion as, once again, she cries, “Ah!” at the highest pitch level, A-natural, over the flames of motif 6. In mm. 45-51, as the young woman sings of her passionate love, “Love . . . like a burning city in the breast!” an accented low C is played in the left hand with a slowly descending scale beginning on B-flat lasting seven measures. The soaring vocal line over the steadily descending scale in the left hand of the piano part and the obsessive flames of the right hand highlight the protagonist’s detachment from reality, and signal the sealing the lover’s fate.

As the protagonist’s passion wanes the flames in the accompaniment begin to extinguish in m. 52, and they stall momentarily as she cries out again with a weaker “Ah!” Motif 3 is stated in the accompaniment in mm. 53 and 55, and in mm. 54-55 the

woman she sings an even feebler “Ah!” with a *ritard* and rapid *diminuendo* to *pianissimo* followed by a brief pause before moving into another section.

A quiet and quick ascending C-natural minor scale leads abruptly into a new section at m. 56 that is different than anything that has come before it; Heggie has marked this section, “Stately (not slow).” For only the second time in the cycle the composer chooses a simple meter, 4/4 (the introduction of the first song was in 4/4 until the voice entered). This section represents another brief moment of clarity for the main character. In m. 56 the accompaniment changes into motif 7: repeated eighth notes in thirds in the right hand of the piano part. Another slowly descending scale beginning in m. 56 in the left hand of the piano part evokes a march to the death. It is over this death march that she begins to understand her fate and states, “I think however that of all alive, I only in such utter, ancient way, Do suffer love; in me alone survive the unregenerate passions . . .” She throws caution to the wind in mm. 62-64 as the meter shifts back to 6/8, the tempo pushes forward and the keening returns in the accompaniment. She sings of “treacherous queens with death upon the tread” over descending rolled minor chords that summon the image of rolling heads at the guillotine. As the tempo slows again, there are descending, repetitive chords in the left hand of the piano that echo the walk to the guillotine as she chooses her fate, willfully taking her knight to bed. The chords finally settle to repeated octaves of low D’s as the right hand of the accompaniment flourishes with the “bright and nervous” motif 3 of the introduction. A quickly ascending D-flat major scale into motif 5 ends the song in mm. 73 and 74 reminding the listener of the protagonist’s overflowing passions at the beginning of the song. This places the young

woman firmly in her delusions as she moves into the innocent euphoria of madness of the third song.

### **Song 3: Not In A Silver Casket**

Not in a silver casket cool with pearls  
 Or rich with red corundum or with blue,  
 Locked, and the key withheld, as other girls  
 Have given their love, I give my love to you;  
 Not in a lovers'-knot, not in a ring  
 Worked in such fashion, and the legend plain—  
 Semper fidelis, where a secret spring  
 Kennels a drop of mischief for the brain:  
 Love in the open hand, no thing but that,  
 Ungemmed, unhidden, wishing not to hurt,  
 As one should bring you cowslips in a hat,  
 Swung from the hand, or apples in her skirt,  
 I bring you, calling out as children do:  
 "Look what I have!—And these are all for you."<sup>47</sup>

In the third song, the second of Millay's sonnets, there is again a change in voice, and the Ophelia-like character states her love in the simplest terms she can, not wanting to hide it, but to call out "as children do: 'Look what I have!'" She is no longer the femme fatale or temptress of the preceding song but the innocent maiden who seems at times on the brink of hysteria. She does not want to play the games of love as a temptress might, asserting that true, faithful love is pure and uncomplicated: "Love in the open hand, no thing but that." She does not want to hide it with gifts and games but to revel in it as a little girl might delight in pleasing her father. This is the victim, the innocent young maiden whose senses are snapped by the purity of these undiluted emotions. She is

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<sup>47</sup> Millay, *Fatal Interview*, 11.

suffering from a lovesick melancholia and her consciousness has become splintered. The composer is able to bring this maiden to life, to draw the listener to her with some of the same conventions of the first two pieces, and with the addition of others. He draws on and increases the use of thirds heard in the previous songs (motif 7); metric and tonal ambiguity; the use of recurrent motifs and rhythmic patterns; and quick shifts of meter, dynamics and mood.

Heggie uses simple meters in this cycle to exhibit the protagonist's lucidity. The meter of the third song begins in a simple meter, 4/4, and constantly moves between 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 for the first 26 measures of the song. Even though the meters are relatively straightforward, Heggie uses a combination of syncopation (mm. 2, 10, and 11); notes tied across bar lines in the vocal line and the accompaniment (mm. 1-2, 18-19, 19-20, 21-22 and 35-36); and a frequency of shifting meters that mask the downbeats. There are 17 meter shifts in this 44 measure song. The first song has one meter shift, and there are only 12 in the second which is a much longer song (73 measures). The key signature appears to be E major but it is aurally vague. There is not the pronounced modality of the first two songs but there are allusions to Lydian mode with an occasionally raised 4<sup>th</sup> scale degree (A-sharp).

The song begins with two motifs that recur in some configuration throughout the song as well as at the end of the last song. Motif 8 is an introductory statement in the accompaniment in mm. 1 and 2, which is in rising thirds. In this case the pattern is major third, minor third, minor third but the composer shifts this pattern in the restatements. He ends the song with motif 8 and couples it with an ascending line that gives an effect of



ending with a question: to where does she go from here? Motif 9 grows out of the introductory statement of motif 8 in the vocal line of m. 2 and both hands of the piano part with a series of rising and falling eighth notes: A-sharp, B, C-sharp, D-sharp, C-sharp, B, A-sharp. There are numerous statements of some form of this figure throughout the song (mm. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29 and 30). The repetitive quality of the eighth note pattern, along with the sheer number of repetitions is representative of the obsessive nature of this maiden's psyche and foreshadows, or confirms, her mental break.

Heggie uses another recurrent pattern that links this song to the previous songs and highlights the child-like subconscious of the protagonist as well as her neurotic tendencies: repetitive eighth notes in thirds of motif 6. In m. 2 the piano part has an E and G-sharp seven times in a row before moving to D-natural and F-sharp in m. 3. This pattern of recurrent thirds occurs many times throughout the song (mm. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, and 30.) The focus of thirds throughout this cycle peaks in the third song and is a way that Heggie hints at a folk-like nature, contributes a penetrating persistence to her obsessive condition, while at the same time it represents the simplicity of the innocent maiden's subconscious.

As the young maiden lists the decorated ways in which she is *not* going to show her love to her beloved, the accompaniment is relatively steady. When she makes an offer of her love in m. 8, "I give my love to you," there is silence in the piano. This silence represents the simple, unembellished nature of her love, as she is not offering an ornamented, elaborate form of love but an unpretentious love that speaks for itself.

In m. 14 the static, repetitive thirds of motif 7 give way to sixteenth-note triplets in the top line of the piano part that gives the song forward motion, and an ascending scale in the left hand begins a shift in tonality centering around E-flat (enharmonic shift from D-sharp to E-flat). This leads to a sense of franticness in mm. 12, 13, and 14 as the triplets recall the fire theme, motif 5, of song 2 as the legend is inscribed on the ring, “*Semper fidelis.*” There are repeated E-flats in the left hand of the accompaniment that support the tonal center but the right hand is playing a version of the opening motifs that include lowered 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> scale degrees with an occasionally lowered 6<sup>th</sup> (F-flat, D-flat, and C-flat) which undermine the integrity of the E-flat.

In mm. 15 and 16 the accompaniment includes a more dissonant variation of motif 8 of the opening measures. The accompaniment seems to halt momentarily in m. 15 but eventually leads into rolling thirds as she sings, “where a secret spring kennels a drop of mischief for the brain.” The “mischievous secret” that she is hiding in a “spring” is represented by undulating thirds and octaves that depict water settling after her “secret” has been tossed in.

At the end of m. 21 the accompaniment returns to the simplicity of motif 7 with repeated eighth notes in thirds as the protagonist returns to statements of uncomplicated love. This reprieve is short-lived lasting only four measures before the young woman’s psyche finally fractures in m. 26. The tempo suddenly increases and the meter shifts to 5/8. This is the first time in the cycle that Heggie uses a complex meter, if only for a short time (mm. 26-27). The accompaniment becomes a broken waltz in mm. 27-29 as the

young maiden naïvely compares her love to *plucked wild flowers* in a hat and “*apples in her skirt.*”

The meter moves between 6/8 and 9/8 for this rest of the song and as the protagonist calls “out like children do,” the accompaniment becomes pulsing eighth notes in seventh and ninth chords. This creates excitement and propels the song forward to an *accelerando* on a descending scale that ends on an A major chord in m. 35. Sixteenth note triplet arpeggiations in mm. 35 and 38 attempt to move the song forward but stop on sustained chords in mm. 36 and 38. The A major seventh chords in these two measures represent the ecstasy of her delusion as she offers herself to her lover.

In m. 39 the sixteenth note triplets in the piano part begin to ascend in triads from a low D-sharp and are coupled with a climbing eighth note scale that also begins on a low D-sharp. The rising pitches, tempo and dynamics are very dramatic as emotions rise to a fever pitch and the protagonist soars to her highest yet (A to B-natural) as she offers herself. She refers specifically to her lover in m. 42 as motif 9 is restated in the left hand of the accompaniment under the undulating sixteenth note triplets that have settled into E major. It seems as if the song will end in E major but motif 8 is added in the last measure (A-sharp, B, D-sharp) over a sustained E major chord that obscures the tonality. The E major chord in the last measure implies that there will be a happy ending for the maiden, but the inclusion of the short motif foreshadows the young woman’s fate.

#### **Song 4: Spring**

To what purpose, April, do you return again?  
Beauty is not enough.  
You can no longer quiet me with the redness

Of little leaves, opening stickily.  
 I know what I know.  
 The sun is hot on my neck as I observe  
 The spikes of the crocus.  
 The smell of the earth is good.  
 It is apparent that there is no death.  
 But what does that signify?  
 Not only underground are the brains of men  
 Eaten by maggots,  
 Life in itself  
 Is nothing.  
 An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.  
 It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,  
 April  
 Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.<sup>48</sup>

The last poem, *Spring*, is in free verse and was written about ten years before the sonnets of *Fatal Interview*. This Ophelia-like young maiden has returned to her senses, and has given up. She is no longer the naïve young woman with immature expressions of love. She is a jaded Ophelia without the will to live, the heroine who is breaking her patriarchal chains and preparing to join nature through her death in the pond. She is surrounded by obtuse men whose “brains are eaten by maggots” not just in death, but also in life. In her own words, “Life in itself is nothing.” This heroine speaks the harsh and violent words of life’s realities and has given up. The last song in the cycle brings the listener back to the beginning of the cycle. This is an Ophelia before she plunges into the water.

Heggie uses the motifs from the preceding three songs to unify the cycle and finish the narrative. He also uses techniques that are familiar at this point: ambiguous meter and key, repetitive use of thirds, hints of modality, and an extreme amount of

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<sup>48</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Second April*, (New York: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1921), 1.

sudden shifts of mood which can be heard in the accompaniment textures, continually changing meters, and dynamics.

This song begins with a very slow tempo: quarter note equals 48. The first sounds the listener hears are dissonant bell tones that seem to echo as a death knell. The 4/4 pulse is weakened by the use of sustained pitches that make it very difficult to discern the 4/4 meter. It is further veiled at the entrance of the voice on beat 4 of m. 3 when it joins a descending scale of thirds in the piano part that begins on the second half of beat 2 in m. 3. Repeated use of motif 4 in mm. 4-7 and 9-11 highlights the starkness of the accompaniment and contributes to the vague nature of the meter. There is a recitative-like quality to the vocal line above the statements of motif 4 that enter on the offbeat.

The first ten measures of *Spring* are in B-flat harmonic minor (although the key signature is B-flat major). In m. 12 there is a sudden increase in tempo and a key shift to B minor. Heggie continues to employ the harmonic minor scale for two measures (with the use of A-sharp), and the accompaniment textures become thicker with more motion before an ascending B-natural minor scale leads to the familiar motif of song 3.

The repeated eighth notes in thirds of motif 7 are used in addition to motif 9 in mm. 15-17 over the declaration of this jaded young woman as she sings on repeated B's, "The smell of the earth is good. It is apparent that there is no death." As the heroine reaches the word "death" in m. 18 the meter changes abruptly to 6/8 and the tempo increases slightly. The shift from a simple to a compound meter represents the heroine's loss of lucidity and is the first signal that she is losing her senses. Another indication of this lies in the accompaniment, where disjointed repetitions of motif 2 occur in the

right hand of the piano part while the left hand consists of mostly descending portions of the B-natural minor scale with a lowered fifth scale degree. The next five measures are in Dorian mode as the note D is the focus and Heggie uses the lowered F-natural and C-natural. The vocal line over this splintered piano part consists of soaring hemiolas at a *forte* dynamic level in mm. 20-22: “There is no death.” This creates a disconnect between the vocal line and the accompaniment that suggests that the heroine has already begun to rise above her worldly cares. At the statement of the word “death,” in the left hand of the accompaniment begins a long descending scale that leads to the young maiden’s question on ascending scale: “But what does that signify?” This dichotomy highlights her detachment from this mortal coil and sets up a brief return to lucidity in measure 25. The music quickly gets louder and abruptly stops on an E-flat fermata on the last syllable of the word “signify.” The end of the phrase stops her suddenly as she snaps out of her delusions in another quick shift in m. 25.

At this point there is an extreme change in the mood of the song. The rest of this 48-measure song contains many such alterations that mirror the heroine’s psyche. Two and a half counts of silence before the voice entrance obscure a return to 4/4. The tempo broadens and the key changes to C minor with a return to the harmonic minor scale. In mm. 26-27 there is a sustained low C to B-natural in the left hand of the piano part that increases the feeling of doom as the heroine asserts, “Not only underground are the brains of men eaten by maggots.” A reference under the vocal line to motif 4 is in the right hand of the accompaniment with octave jumps on thirds. This is a reference to the obtuse men surrounding the protagonist whose brains are rotting, even as they still live. *A subito*

*piano* in m. 28 and substantially starker accompaniment lead to a symbolic silence at m. 28, as the young maiden surrenders: “Life in itself is nothing.” There is further word painting after the fermata on beat 3 of m. 29 as she sings of life as “an empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs,” on a descending triplet scale, suggesting her downwardly spiraling mental state.

Octave thirds recalling motif 4 in m. 31 lead to a transition to 6/8 in m. 32 and a shift to C major with a lowered seventh, which begins yet another short section in mm. 32-35 that Heggie marks “flowingly.” The use of the major scale with a lowered seventh echoes the Mixolydian mode of the first song. The ambiguity of meter increases mm. 32-33 with tied notes over the bar lines in the left hand of the accompaniment as well as a *poco a poco accelerando*.

In m. 36 there is another quick transition that is the most sudden of all the shifts in the cycle and signals the final break for the heroine. There is a new meter, 4/8, as the protagonist cries, “April comes, like an idiot.” Here the vocal line is accompanied by exciting musical material not yet heard in the cycle: three fluctuating, accented, and staccato descending whole tone scales. Measure 38 shifts back to 6/8 and m. 40 changes to D-flat major but this time with the lowered 7<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Dorian mode.

Under the floating E-flat to F-flat in mm. 40-42 in the vocal line the accompaniment returns to fragments of motif 2. There is another meter shift back to 4/4 in m. 42 as the accompaniment repeats the rolled chords of motif 1. There are only three times in the cycle that Heggie chooses to make use of rolled chords: in the introduction of the first song (mm. 3-4), in the second song when the temptress speaks of “death upon the

tread” (mm.65-66.), and at the end of the entire cycle (mm. 44, 45, and 48). The rolled chords at the end of the cycle are enharmonically identical to the chords of the introduction of the cycle, and they return the listeners to the ripples of the water above the drowning heroine. They signify death.

The rolled chords are paired with octave low D-flats in the left hand of the accompaniment and lead into motif 5. This motif is heard twice as the heroine is freely singing “Ah” in a rapid *decrescendo*. The meter then changes to 6/4 in m. 46 as ascending chords in the accompaniment suggest the main character’s soul as it ascends. The cycle ends with an incomplete statement of the motif 8, followed by another rolled chord of motif 1 as the dying heroine sings a pianissimo “Ah.” A D-flat minor chord with octave low D’s in the bass represent the water closing in around her; she is sinking and there is no doubt as to her fate—one can almost see and hear *Hamlet’s* Ophelia, during a moment of clarity, uttering these cries as she surrenders herself to the water.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The Ophelia with whom most people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are familiar is not the same character introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare. She has taken an archetypal journey that can be traced through representations of her in art and music over the last 300 years. Her passage through differing cultures and eras created an archetypal evolution for the character that Shakespeare would never have imagined. Carl Jung's theories on archetypes and the collective unconscious offer an explanation for Ophelia's transformation through the centuries into the present. She has been adapted according to the views on women and madness in the prevailing societies.

Ophelia began in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as the innocent, young maiden suffering from melancholia. As her likeness evolved from the 18<sup>th</sup> into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, she came to represent the Romantic ideal of uniting with nature through her death in the pond. At the same time, she was beginning to symbolize society's fear of women's sexuality as the temptress, or the femme fatale. Into the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries she has come to stand for women as they contend with the chains of a continually patriarchal society.

Jake Heggie took a character that has reached a near cult status in the Western world and composed a song cycle that offers a fresh interpretation. His choice of Edna St. Vincent Millay's sonnets connects the cycle to Shakespeare. Millay's own reputation ties

the character of this cycle to the archetypal representation of Ophelia as a temptress, a 20<sup>th</sup> century femme fatale. Heggie was also able to organize the poems in a way that represents Ophelia's archetypal journey from the innocent maiden, to the temptress or femme fatale, to the heroine and her death and symbolic rebirth in water. The composer used varied techniques to evoke poetic themes of Ophelia's archetypal transformation.

Jake Heggie has given Ophelia a new beginning. Through his careful selection of poetry, along with his creative compositional techniques, he has succeeded in portraying several of the archetypal images of Ophelia derived from the last three centuries. In doing so, he has presented to modern culture an Ophelia with whom they can relate.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PERMISSION TO USE EXCERPTS**

On Sat, Mar 17, 2012 at 11:30 AM, Jake Heggie <[jake.heggie@bcglobal.net](mailto:jake.heggie@bcglobal.net)> wrote:

Dear Liz,

Thank you so much for your email. And you do need permission to use the excerpts - and as publisher and copyright owner I'm happy to grant that permission to you. Best of luck with the dissertation.

Sincerely,

Jake Heggie

"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." (Oscar Wilde)

[www.jakeheggie.com](http://www.jakeheggie.com)

## APPENDIX B

## MOTIFS

## Song 1: Ophelia's Song

## Motif 1: mm. 1-5

Freely

L.H.

shimmering *f*

*p*

*mp*

*pp*

## Motif 2: mm. 7-10

The hills are green, my dear one, and blossoms are fill-ing the air.

## Song 2: Women Have Loved Before

### Motifs 3-5: mm. 1-3

Bright and nervous ♩. = 82

*mp* Ah! \_\_\_\_\_

*mf* *f*

### Motif 3:

### Motif 4:

### Motif 5:

Ah! \_\_\_\_\_



**Motif 6: mm. 45-48**

musical notation for Motif 6, measures 45-48. The score is in 8/8 time, key of B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and a crescendo. The left hand is mostly empty.

musical notation for Motif 6, measures 45-48. The score is in 8/8 time, key of B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and a forte dynamic. The left hand is mostly empty.

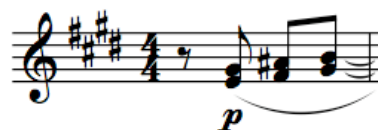
**Motif 7: mm. 56-61**

musical notation for Motif 7, measures 56-61. The score is in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with a piano dynamic. The left hand is mostly empty.

musical notation for Motif 7, measures 56-61. The score is in 4/4 time, key of B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with a piano dynamic. The left hand is mostly empty.

### Song 3: Not in a Silver Casket

Motif 8: pick up to m. 1



Motif 9: m. 1

*mp*

Not in a sil - ver cas - ket

## APPENDIX C

### IMAGES OF OPHELIA: LIST OF PAINTINGS DISCUSSED IN THE TEXT

1. Francesco Bartolozzi, *Ophelia vide Hamlet*, (colored etching after a drawing by Henry Tresham), 1974. Folger Shakespeare Library.
2. Hugh Diamond Welch, *Untitled [Mental Patient, Surrey County Lunatic Asylum,]* (photograph), c. 1851-52, Royal Society of Medicine, London, England.
3. Arhtur Hughes, *Ophelia*, 1852, Manchester City Art Galleries, Manchester, Englane.
4. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1852, Tate Museum of Art, London, England.
5. Madeleine Lemaire, *Ophelia*, (painting), 1880, n.p.
6. Georg Falkenberg, *Ophelia*, (photograph), 1898, n.p.
7. John Austen, *Death of Ophelia*, (pen and ink), 1922, Folger Shakespeare Library.
8. Kim Stringfellow, *Ophelia*, (photograph), 1989,  
<http://www.kimstringfellow.com/>;  
<http://kimstringfellow.photoshelter.com/gallery/Portraiture-Music/G0000rT.eztltwH0/>
9. Gregory Crewdson, *Untitled (Ophelia)*, (photograph), 2000-2001, Gagosian Galleries, NY.

### Links to These Images of Ophelia and Others Can be Found at These Websites

1. [http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Ophelia.html](http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Ophelia.html)
2. Shakespeare Folger Library: <http://www.folger.edu/>
3. Galería de Ofelias: <http://perso.wanadoo.es/al.59/Ofelias.htm>

## APPENDIX D

### JAKE HEGGIE RECORDINGS

#### *Published Recording of Jake Heggie's "Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia"*

1. Heggie, Jake. *Passing By: Songs by Jake Heggie*. Avie Records, Compact Disc, 2010.

#### *More Jake Heggie Recordings Can Be Found Here*

1. [http://www.jakeheggie.com/n\\_recordings.htm](http://www.jakeheggie.com/n_recordings.htm)